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MORE TRUTH ABOUT WOMAN IN INDUSTRY

BY ELIZABETH CARPENTER.

AFTER a most plausible array of disheartening facts about "Woman in Industry," Mrs. Flora McDonald Thompson, in the May number of the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, draws her final equation of the whole matter in this wise:

I. "The practice of so-called economic independence has achieved for woman financial results indicated in the fact that her average earnings are less than one dollar a day.

II. "The effect of the practice upon economic interests is to lessen efficiency and to increase the cost of production.

III. "The effect upon the woman herself is to impair her physical fitness for the maternal function, and to subject her to a false system of education, which mentally and morally unfits her for her economic office in the family.

IV. "The effect upon society is to promote pauperdom, both by increasing the expense of living, and by robbing men of the responsibility which gives them force and success in their natural office of dispenser of wealth to the family."

In a supreme burst of pessimism, this trenchant summary concludes: "In a word, the truth about woman in industry is, she is a frightful failure."

Can all these things be as depressingly proven as Mrs. Thompson would fain have us believe? Let us see.

The first assumption is that the average woman earns less than one dollar a day; but, according to the writer's own testimony, the normal woman in industry is "the woman wholly or in part supported by others." Here lies a fact upon the very surface of the argument which at once stamps the whole comparison of masculine and feminine labor as fundamentally unfair.

The subject, apparently, is broader, deeper, more significant than isolated statistics upon certain hundreds or thousands of

women workers, newly arrived in the masculine fields of general industrialism, and there placed in competition with men.

The question of man *versus* woman is as old as time; the problems of male *versus* female are as delicate as those of flower *versus* plant, and it is only repeating endless confusions to attempt to force upon the individuality of woman the time-worn tests and trials of the energies of man. *Thus far* the average earnings of woman may be less than one dollar a day; but it is a proven truth (which Mrs. Thompson repeats herself) that, thus far at least, a woman can live upon less than a man. The fair conclusion, therefore, accentuates itself—the woman equals the man in ability to preserve life; her needs are less, she accepts less pay. Thus, as an active factor, she justifies her existence in the economic world and upon a purely economic basis. To refuse pay sufficient for her needs only because her stronger companion is unable to sustain himself upon her more modest levels, would be sentimentalism pushed to such extremes as would ruin forever her plea for some place in a purely practical world.

But, says Mrs. Thompson, “the effect of the practice upon economic interests is to lessen efficiency and to increase the cost of production.” In the face of assertion I., this claim seems of doubtful force. Is it not undeniably true that the modern employer considers more carefully the physical well-being of his men, as well as of his women employees? Do not factories, stores, etc., where both sexes are employed, open and close at the same hour for all concerned, irrespective of sex? And is not the standard objection to the labor-unions one that rebels against an established rule of consideration for the average man, pushed even to the extent of crippling the possibilities of exceptionally strong individuals? Will it be claimed that *men* are never sick or disabled? If so, why so many beneficiary societies? Why a pension roll? Why a retired list for army and navy? Why the innumerable provisions of railroads, and, increasingly, all corporations, for the help of disabled or temporarily crippled employees, most of whom are male?

That women, as a sex, have more physical endurance, more patience under prolonged pressure than men is too well-known a truth to repeat it again. This plea certainly needs broader horizons than the environment of a sick girl on a couch in a department store.

Women's demand for physical consideration on account of their sex, is all along the line of more humane human living, and the existence of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals as well as to children is no better proof of inferiority in beast or child than the eight-hour law is of male incapacity for a reasonable day's work. If the point is still pressed, in a last analysis, perhaps, the unfortunate fact that drunkenness is largely a masculine failing might even the balance where purely bodily handicaps are concerned.

We do not look upon a man as an object of pity because modern masters have caught the spirit of general progress and are more considerate, more humane than the average employer of mediæval times. Are soldiers illustrations of a "hopeless charity," because modern governments provide camp hospitals, the Red Cross army, and such food and creature comforts as the regiments of the Good Queen Bess or of Frederick the Great never dreamed of receiving? Humanity is not charity, it is justice; and if, indeed, the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics reports in such fashion that the records show "the tender concern of good men for frail women," it is simply an evidence of a civilized spirit which does credit to the men and is no dishonor to the women.

There is a fatal flaw in all statistics which contrast the male and female forces in the industrial world, or anywhere else, for that matter. No true woman wants to be a man, any more than a virile man wants to be a woman. For all time they are simply—*different*; "male and female created He them," and it is as futile to attempt to equalize them as it would be to make a deer love the ways of a lion, or an eagle content himself with the scope of a wren. Each has a place and that place is final. Statistics, therefore, which aim to prove that newly-arrived woman fails to equal experienced man are no more fair than would be figures which showed the superiority of the trained artisan over the raw apprentice. It is a plain truth that in the world of industry, outside the domestic régime, women are still strangers; they are merely beginners, apprentices; and it is centuries too early to attempt final conclusions as to their industrial acceptability when compared with men.

But, here we approach Mrs. Thompson's third point, "the effect upon the woman herself is to impair her physical fitness for the maternal function, and to subject her to a false system of educa-

tion, which mentally and morally unfits her for her economic office in the family." To the first clause of such a sweeping paragraph every earnest thinker will be moved to pay the closest attention; and if it can be established as an incontrovertible fact that labor impairs woman's "physical fitness for the maternal function," it is one that must "give us pause."

But has not this danger been, at least partly, realized and provided for? In France, we are told, the Council of Salubrity determines "what branches of industry a woman may engage in without detriment to her health."

France, among the modern nations of the world, has an enviable record in regard to her industrial ability. She has a thriftiness, a capacity, a recuperative quality, not easily equalled, and yet we hear continually that "in France, the men are the women and the women are the men."* That is, in France it is a notable fact that the clear-headed, steady-nerved, keen-sighted wife is the economic force which conserves, and also frequently produces, the supplies necessary for the support of the family.

But it is also true, as the quick observer will at once note, that in France the problem of declining maternity is at present a menacing one, and on the surface, the idea that economic success injures motherhood's probabilities might appear to be justified. But M. Zola, who was the great modern materialist, in this especial phase of human living, has declared in many of his books, and most especially in his novel, "*Fécondité*," that, when families in France are restricted in numbers, it is generally due to one of two things. First, the hard-working husband objects to many children as a drain upon his resources; or, second, the ambitious rich couples refuse to raise families, as their chief desire is to leave their estates intact to a single heir, and thus transmit the family name and possessions.

Here, then, we have an array of facts which leaves the woman in industry unassailed, and modern American life sustains the situation. Mrs. Thompson says: "Now, in the design of nature, which neither university courses nor political emancipation can overthrow, the destiny of woman is wifehood, maternity. Abstract these offices from any calculation concerning the sex, and we have the end of the world." The truth of this is readily granted; but we are told also that in the industrial world 17.22 per cent., in-

* Mr. Richard Whiting in "Paris of To-day."

cluding all workers above ten years of age, covers the entire class of feminine industrial factors. There are thus left 82.78 per cent. to sustain the normal order of production; and when we consider the widows, the spinsters, and the deserted wives who are forced upon the field, through no desire of their own for economic independence, the actual number of women insisting upon equal competition within masculine lines grows even ridiculously small.

Noting now that this minute army is "constantly depleted by marriage," and also that "the permanency of woman in industry is as a class and not as an individual," and then admitting that, through her less dominant demands, the woman is able to toil for a lower wage than the man, it still persistently appears, through Mrs. Thompson's own conclusions, that any deterioration in the scale of living which female labor brings about is counterbalanced by the delicacy of woman's constitution, which demands for her comforts and luxuries, all of which are an expense to her employer.

Where maternity is concerned, the admitted truth fully exonerates the average woman in the economic world. It is not the laboring-man's wife, the washerwoman, nor the scrubwoman who fails in fecundity, although these toil daily with all their might, overtaxing repeatedly their poorly nourished physiques; nor is it the mate of the middle-class man, that ideal housewife who justifies the old saw,

"Man's work is from sun to sun;
But woman's work is never done."

It is not these (let us insist upon this significant fact); it is not these women who are childless; it is those who rival the lilies of the field. "They toil not, neither do they spin"; but it is they—the rich women, the prosperous ones, the unemployed, the leaders of "social sets," the queens of "social functions," who are more and more insistently refusing to perform the only labor which life has asked of them—the office of reproduction. To the average girl in factory or mill, a home, a husband and a child are still, evidently, such desirable things that she leaves her work and her wage continually, and insists upon "depleting by marriage" her industrial world until she is the despair of the statistician.

In the light of the broadest truth, then, the effect of economic labor is not to be compared in harmful tendencies to the effect of the unused leisure, the petty social ambitions and the soul-be-

numbing selfishness which follow so often in the train of men's acquired millions.

It is not toil, effort, energy, which disintegrates an individual or a nation; it is idleness, inertia, and a desire to allow the willing few to assume the burden of personal support for the many. The spectacle of one hard-pressed male called upon to feed, clothe and decorate half a dozen able-bodied females, "his sisters and his cousins and his aunts," is one the modern world finds degrading to both parties in the uneven contract, and in this remnant of mediæval ethics there is that which smacks of mediæval crudeness.

Again, "the physical fitness for the maternal function" cannot be impaired except through physical degeneration, and careful physicians have shown that among the most trying, enervating and exhausting strains to which the feminine physique can be subjected, perhaps washing, ironing, sweeping and nursing the sick may be counted as in the lead. The trained nurse is an eminently feminine laborer, and yet the testimony in many hospitals is that which declares that it is the exception and not the rule to send out graduates whose physical condition is as good as when they entered upon their training. Statistics claim that, among the insane, farmers' wives often lead in the list; and yet the life of a farmer's wife is dominantly domestic.

But there is still a second clause to be met. "Mentally and morally," the working-woman is unfit for her "economic office in the family." Now why? The writer uses herself as an illustration, and we are therefore excused for becoming personal for a moment. Mrs. Thompson says: "I hire a capable woman to manage my house, and by working at my profession I earn money that compensates my family for the money loss entailed by my domestic inefficiency." Surely, the "capable woman" in the kitchen ordering a household régime and paid by another one, equally capable, at her desk in the library, is a far better situation for any family than a literary woman bungling over range, in linen-closet and dining-room, and a first-class, but not learned, house-keeper vainly hunting work by which to sustain her own possible family.

Why is it a proof of mental or moral inefficiency that a woman earns money in a way which is both pleasant and easy for herself and profitable for others less gifted intellectually?

Was Mrs. Browning of less use to her husband and to the world than she would have been if she had attempted to cook the family meals and sweep the common house? All labor is dignified and uplifting, if properly approached; but all labor is not fitting to each individual.

Shall, then, the woman of active mentality be accused of inefficiency if she lacks only tough physical fibre, or even the practical intelligence that deals knowingly with a domestic régime? It was Mary and not Martha who "chose the better part," according to the greatest of all teachers.

Let it not be said, then, that in a world of men, where even a statistician "never forgets that he is dealing with ladies," the demand upon women recognized in the twentieth century is only for the functions acknowledged by primitive man.

When woman touched man's brain and his soul; when she proved she could sustain fully her maternal functions, and also meet him as companion and friend; then, for the first time in his history, man became altruistic and realized that, within the compass of one home, and with one wife, he could reach a higher grade of civilization than when he ignorantly insisted that motherhood alone should absorb all of a woman's energies.

It is quite true (to return to our direct argument) that "business is business"; but it is also true that the three meals a day, in the humblest household, cannot wait to be served any longer than an editor can wait for copy—yea, not even if the wife is ill or has a baby in her arms. Indeed, the regular demands of average home life, the mere necessities of daily existence, the "what-shall-we-eat, what-shall-we-drink, and wherewithal-shall-we-be-clothed" cry of a wide-awake family, never cease, from the sound of the first call to labor at sunrise until the last stocking is darned, by the mother (at midnight, perhaps), after all the male economic factors in the outside world are soundly asleep in their respective beds.

No one interested in human development, no one concerned in the welfare of our human institutions, cares for a moment to belittle the importance of a woman's presence at home, of a mother's supreme mission, of a wife's significant duties; but let us not confuse our values; let us not assume that—if, indeed, "business is business," and is not yet based upon the Golden Rule—the business world is and forever will be a degener-

ating, debasing atmosphere, and one that necessarily disintegrates a woman's moral and mental fibre where domestic relations are involved. The steady progress of the general world towards broader, gentler, more Christian actualities, in the very heart of the business centres of to-day, shows unmistakably that the basic values of the Golden Rule may in time grow to be appreciated even in the mart of a noisy world.

Business men are not "ravening beasts," that delicate or even sickly women need quake with terror when the stern necessities of life force them into office, store, factory or mill. The intrusive fact that the "servant problem" is the deepest issue in modern domestic economy proves irrefutably that working-women, as a class, have found living conditions more acceptable in the industrial world, outside the home, than they were in household service; and it is lamentably true that the expert cook is by no means a comforting illustration of "sweetness and light."

There are a thousand things within the narrow sphere of a woman's most circumscribed domestic career that may debase her mentality and stifle her soul, until her attitude towards the world at large (and man in particular) is that of Mr. Kipling's "Vampire":

"And it isn't the blame, and it isn't the shame
That stings like a redhot brand;
It's coming to know she never knew why,
And never could understand."

Life is a larger thing than living; and unless the woman, the mother, the reproductive factor at home, can touch the world of her acting fellow beings outside at some vital point in their development; unless at least 17.22 per cent. in the labor world can feel and see and even suffer through "the cares that infest the day," there will gradually come upon our fertile earth a dismal hour when Western mothers will begin to bring forth only hybrid males—masculine bodies, handicapped by feminine fears; and we shall drift slowly back into the languorous incapacities of Oriental dreams, where sex overshadows all mental and moral values, and the Sultan and the harem illustrate the result of confining woman too closely to her strictly physical function.

But Mrs. Thompson's next point suggests a novel danger. "The effect upon society is to promote pauperdom, both by increasing the expense of living, and by robbing men of the responsibility

which gives them force and success in their natural office of dispenser of wealth to the family."

In the large horizons which attract progressive man towards ever-new fields of effort, towards ever-increasing wants in the way of refined and comfortable existence, surely pauperdom does not increase in proportion to the expense of living. If this were true, the logical conclusion would naturally be that the naked Indian, sheltered in a tent and warmed by his blanket, is a better type of man than the successful citizen of our latest time, who is clad in comfort and elegance, and housed in a dwelling equipped by the eager intelligence of his fellow men, who have combined with him to make physical existence a pleasant and luxurious thing. To increase our needs is surely not to invite pauperdom. The pauper is the man who is content with only the bare necessities of daily living; the prosperous one is he who has a thousand wants, and who actively strives to gratify them. "Men's conduct shapes out their fortunes, and the unlucky are never the valiant nor the wise."

But if, in the money-getting world, about one-sixth of the workers are women, will this fact really "rob men of the responsibility which gives them force and success in their natural office of dispenser of wealth to the family"? Mrs. Thompson says: "It is better even for the family to suffer want than to entail upon the man the degradation of character imposed upon him when he becomes dependent upon a woman's earnings for support." This is a strange claim when woman's endangered maternal function is under discussion. If the alternative must be faced, of a suffering family, of poorly fed and uneducated children, or a husband (an adult) supinely leaning upon her for his creature comforts, what true mother may hesitate for a moment? If she sacrifices the future of her offspring to sustain the feeble manhood of her husband, she is a traitor to her highest duty—the imperative obligation to reproduce not only a quantity, but a quality (in so far as she is able), that will aid in the gradual uplift of mankind at large.

The adult, all statistics show, rarely reforms; the hope of any people under a ban is in the calibre of its children, its coming generations; and if, in truth, there are to be found, here and there, males who are ready to surrender their "natural office as dispenser of wealth to the family," the supine minority is of such

contemptible value, in the general sum of human progress, that the capable females can well afford to leave them behind in the race for success, while they see to it that their children are properly trained to atone, by developed energies, in a new decade, for their fathers' incapacity in this.

And, finally: "In a word the truth about woman in industry is, she is a frightful failure."

If "woman in industry" means an Amazonian virago, clamoring for "woman's rights"; a swaggering hoyden, aping men's modes and manners; or even a too-ambitious worker insisting upon an equal race for power, within purely masculine limits, all honest men, and women, too, will be glad to discover that she has been and still is "a frightful failure." Every time a woman endangers the dignities and responsibilities of her especial sex, she deserves to fail, and Nature will see to it that she does. Every time a woman belittles or scorns the supreme duties of wife and mother, she strikes a telling blow at the progress of the human race, and she deserves the heaviest punishment. Every time a man permits a woman to lose her basic values as a reproductive factor, he makes a grievous mistake, for which his sons, or grandsons, must atone in bitterness and sorrow. Therefore, we quite agree with Mrs. Thompson when she pleads for the conservation of the feminine function, for the preservation of the family and the home.

But the fact that a woman, in the deepest sense, is what Mrs. Browning's Adam calls her, viz., "The Mother of all the living," is only one-half the truth for which she stands. A woman, as well as a man, is a human being, first, last and always; and, as such, each must assume a proper place in such fashion as shall develop the highest possibilities of sentient beings, and at the same time secure the steady advance of humanity as a whole. From this point of view, woman has a dual, or triple, function. "The days of man are threescore years and ten," and from these seven decades a woman may reserve only two, or at most three, for maternity. What shall she do with the remainder of her individuality, after she has fully sustained all the requirements of wifehood and motherhood? She has a mind and a soul, as well as a body, and the needs of her especial nature stamp her, even in babyhood, as equipped with certain talents which it is her first duty to develop.

The past is strewn with innumerable wrecks of maimed and ruined lives, because ignorance and prejudice have insisted upon denying to both boys and girls the right to live out themselves according to their inborn tendencies. "Blessed is the man who has found his work"; so also it is with woman. Part of the truth insists upon the conservation of her distinctive force; but the wider scope demands that one function shall not crush nor overwhelm all others.

When woman tries to become man and to do man's work in man's way, she fails, and she will continue to fail as long as sex is the final distinction which no possible element in life can disturb. But the industrial world does not circle about the home without entering its doors. In the tide of affairs that sweeps men on to fortune, the ebb and flow are felt as quickly upon the hearthstone as they are upon the forum, and the woman beside the cradle is as truly an economic factor, is as significantly "the woman in industry," as any of her sisters who happen to be earning a personal income in more direct ways.

Therefore, when "woman in industry" means, as it already does in numberless ways, simply one class of capable human beings expressing themselves after their own particular fashion; when it shows a Rosa Bonheur with her paint-brushes, a George Eliot with her pen, a Clara Barton with a nurse's cap, a small army busied at loom, at counter, as typewriter, in libraries, in hospitals, in kitchens, or in offices, it means only that here, at last, woman is not only the wife of one man, not only the mother of a half-dozen children; but she is normally "the eternal feminine," manifesting anew her distinctive intelligence, earning in the broadest sense her indestructible honor as "Mother of all the living."

ELIZABETH CARPENTER.